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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the concept of parent involvement in preschool intervention programs and presents experimental data relevant to the effectiveness of several preschool and home-based teaching programs for economically disadvantaged children. The range of current assumptions about parents is summarized as: (1) parents need to be taught how to be parents; (2) parents know what they need and can operate their own programs; and (3) parents and educators can become resources for each other. Several experimental home teaching programs conducted by the High/Scope Foundation and based on the third assumption are described briefly: (1) the Ypsilanti-Perry Preschool Project, a preschool combined with weekly home visits; (2) the Ypsilanti Home Teaching Project, a 4-month program of weekly home visits; (3) the Ypsilanti-Carnegie Infant Education Project, in which educators or untrained women visited homes weekly for a 16-month period; and (4) a comparison of three preschool curricula combined with weekly home visits. Longitudinal data from several of these studies is already available, while data from other projects is still being analyzed. In general, it has been concluded thus far that the combination of preschool with home-based components yields impressive immediate and long-term results. Implications and considerations for preschool educators are discussed. (ED)

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PARENT INVOLVEMENT PROCESS AND RESULTS OF THE HIGH/SCOPE FOUNDATION'S PROJECTS*

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INTRODUCTION

It is with considerable frustration that early childhood educators approach their responsibilities today. The task of providing quality service to children and their families has been complicated by the failure to deliver promised outcomes. In the early sixties the enthusiasm of the social reform movement touched early education with the promise of long denied pre-eminence in education through the provision of crucial services to children when they need them most. The idea of critical periods for learning was borrowed from physiology and animal psychology (Scott, 1962); various correlational studies of intellectual development suggested that 50% of the variance in adult scores is accounted for by scores at age four (Bloom, 1964); and most important, politicians began to talk about a "head start" for disadvantaged children that would make them "equal in achievement and ability" by the time they reached kindergarten. Clearly, early education was a field of opportunity. By 1965, when national Head Start was launched, the public as well as the educator was in a state of excitement with the perceived potential of early education . . . and nothing was being done to prepare for the disaster of failed expectations. As early as fall 1965, reports began to drift into the literature of Preschool Lost. The final culminating blow was the study of Head Start graduates in the elementary schools, the Ohio State-Westinghouse Report (Cicarelli, 1969). While based only on the limited analysis of academic data of a short term nature, the study effectively eliminated public confidence in Head Start as a program to "cure" the child. While Head Start has grown and prospered since then, it has been as a broadly based service program and not as a medical model "cure" venture in compensatory education.

What next? While Head Start "helps," where can those of us truly interested in making a difference through the provision of quality

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services turn to find an effective process? Intuitively those involved in early education know that families and children can greatly benefit from services. How can these services be rendered? How do we avoid the pitfalls of the early Head Start program with its elusive promises and programs based on the deficit hypothesis in which the professional corrects the inability of the participant to measure up to established, often arbitrary, standards?

For those familiar with the pendulum sweeps in education, it comes as no great surprise that there is a candidate waiting in the wings to assume the place we hoped for Head Start. The candidate is Parent Involvement.

This paper will present a position of what is needed in early education and then look specifically at a position regarding parent involvement. A particular orientation that offers some promise of avoiding the deliverance of the deficit hypothesis will be presented. Finally, the preschool programs of the High/Scope Foundation will be surveyed and some implications for preschool educators will be drawn.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Parent involvement in education has had a highly varied history over the years. During the great social movement of the sixties, parent involvement generally meant the participation by parents in the advisory and decision-making councils of operating programs such as Head Start, Title I Compensatory Education projects, etc. Yet the fundamental issue is the parent as a key educator of the child and few programs included parents on that level. The most widely circulated appeal on this issue is Bronfrenbrenner's (1974) position paper prepared for the Office of Child Development. While the paper presents a specific view of the research in the field, at times seemingly accepting without question findings that need much clarification, nevertheless, the general position and recommendations are fundamental for the new thrust for parent involvement in the total educational development of the child. A broader review of the research has been developed by Goodson and Hess (in press) in a statement that gives an extended look at specific projects and provides the most recent follow-up data of major studies.

The tragedy of the early education field is that some educators have already "flipped" and adopted parent involvement as the only valid programming position. In accepting such a position, the field is once

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again placed in the position of "all the eggs in one basket," rather than recognizing that there are many forces making each style of programming effective.

Before looking briefly at the home teaching programs of the High/Scope Foundation, the development of the basic philosophy of these programs is discussed.

THE PROCESS OF HOME TEACHING

The home teaching philosophy of the High/Scope Foundation evolved over the past 13 years of work in the homes. At the early stages of the work, the home visits were perceived as a service to the mother to help her see her child learning and enjoying "education." The mother could be involved as much as she wished, but the staff emphasized the service element. After the second year of work, a more educational focus was introduced with emphasis on the mother's participation as the principal teacher of her child. While the actual content of the home teaching did not shift to any great extent, the interrelationship of the teacher-mother-child became more dynamic. The results were immediate. More home visits were completed, the duration of the visits increased, and teachers expressed greater satisfaction with the process of home teaching. In retrospect, the dilemma in home teaching can be seen as a search for an alternative to the deficit assumption in compensatory education. The position can be stated in this manner.

Most early childhood education programs make implicit assumptions about parental involvement that both influence and reflect their attitude toward parents as child-rearers. These assumptions may or may not be consciously recognized by the people responsible for program operations. The range of assumptions about parents can be summarized by the following statements:

- Parents need the benefit of expert knowledge and special training to raise their children effectively. In order to learn these essential skills, they must be involved and trained in education programs derived from laboratory and field research.

- Parents know what they need as parents. They can run effective programs and find the needed resources to accomplish their goals.

- Parents and educators can be resources for each other, working as equals in determining the goals and practices of effective child-rearing.

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(1) Programs with the view that parents need the benefit of expert knowledge and special training to raise their children effectively assume that parents must be trained and involved in education programs in order to learn the essential skills of parenting. Many, if not most, programs have embraced this perspective. For example, Rheingold (1974) states:

> We must set out at once the specifications for a new profession; I shall name it Scientists of Rearing. They shall be scientists who devote themselves to acquiring and testing knowledge on the rearing of children, and to discovering how successful different practices are in achieving the behaviors that index the values society will now espouse, and how successful in eliminating destructive, self-defeating and mean behaviors. These scientists will also teach those who will teach the parents and all those who care for children... Next, parents must be taught how to rear their children... Parents-to-be must be certified as to their competence, and a practical examination is better than a paper one. (pp. 45-46)

Programs with this perspective knowingly or unknowingly assign parents a passive role in the educational program. Implicit in this orientation is that parents are the receivers of predetermined information transmitted by educators or professional staff. Moreover, it represents a philosophical position, the deficit hypothesis, that is currently unacceptable to many members of ethnic minority groups and others who would prefer to emphasize the values of diversity.

(2) Some programs assume that parents know what they need as parents -- that they can run effective programs and find the needed resources to accomplish this goal. Cooperative day care centers in the United States and neighborhood playschool groups in England are the most typical examples of programs in which parents (most frequently mothers) are almost totally responsible for the program operations. Educators or professional staff may serve as resources for the parents, but their involvement is generally only at the request of the parents.

(3) In some programs, parents and educators are considered resources for each other, working as equals in determining the goals and practices of effective child-rearing. Expert knowledge may be utilized to help educators be responsive to and supportive of the individual needs of parents and children. The objective is not to retrain parents but to facilitate self-determined behavior. This is the position in the projects of the High/Scope Foundation.

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This position assumes that parents have the capacity to adequately rear their own children, but need support to overcome specific problems that are common to families in all sectors of society but often more pressing among those with extremely limited resources. The child-rearing role of parents is considered primary, and the task of persons (educators) working with the family is to provide assistance and opportunities for parents to achieve self-determined goals. Home teaching programs of this nature provide parents with opportunities to clarify the goals and aspirations which they hold for their children and to develop an open, problem-solving approach to child-rearing. At the same time, the rights, abilities and individuality of parents are acknowledged and respected. The educational process which typifies this assumption about parents is interactive between the parent(s) and the educator. The educator does not assume the dominant role in the educational process, nor are the parents the only active agents in the program. Each participant acts as resource for the other, and a balance is struck between the collective and individual sources of information and activity. The role is difficult for the educator, because any tendency to subtly dominate the relationship must be strictly avoided if the program is to be successful. (Lambie, Bond, Weikart, 1974, p. 18-20)

HOME TEACHING PROGRAMS OF THE HIGH/SCOPE FOUNDATION

The staff of the Foundation became involved in home teaching in 1962 with the original Ypsilanti-Perry Preschool Project. Since that time three additional research projects have been operated which were partly or entirely based on home teaching. This section reviews each of these projects briefly.

Ypsilanti-Perry Preschool Project

The Ypsilanti-Perry Preschool Project was among the earliest of the wave of cognitively oriented preschool programs for economically disadvantaged children which appeared in the early sixties. From 1962 through 1967, 123 academically "high risk" preschool-age children participated in the project, comprising five successive cohorts of children who entered the project one year apart. Approximately equal numbers of children in each cohort belonged to independent experimental and control groups. Experimental group children attended preschool and received weekly home teaching visits when they were three and four years old; the children in the control group experienced no intervention other than annual testing. Both groups entered the same public schools at age five, and no

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further intervention has taken place since except for periodic data collection.

Currently, children from the Perry Preschool sample are in seventh through eleventh grades. Unlike many longitudinal studies, sample attrition has been slight; of 123 children in the total sample, only one child could not be located during the recent data collection. With support from the Spencer Foundation and Carnegie Corporation it has been possible to continue basic data collection and to perform basic analyses on longitudinal data collected on all children through fourth grade. Results from this phase of the longitudinal study are presented in a report which is in the final stages of preparation.

Findings clearly indicate that even in fourth grade (five years after educational intervention terminated) there were statistically significant and educationally important differences between children who attended preschool and those who did not. Particularly striking was the finding that children who attended preschool were significantly less likely to be retained in grade or placed in special education programs than their peers in the control group. Specifically, of the 90 who remain in Ypsilanti, 13% of the experimental group children are in special education compared to 34% of the control group. Such evidence stands in sharp contrast to the widespread opinion that preschool education has no long-term developmental consequences for economically disadvantaged or culturally different children.

The Ypsilanti Home Teaching Project

The Ypsilanti Home Teaching Project (Weikart and Lambie, 1968) was conducted as a pilot study to explore home teaching as a means of providing preschool services during the spring of 1966. Building on the experience of the home teaching component of the Perry Project, the mother was introduced as the major partner in the education of her young child. The program included 35 children and their mothers in the experimental group and 29 in the control group. Weekly home visits were provided for four months. The basic questions under investigation were 1) to determine the acceptability of home teaching, only as an alternative to both home teaching and preschool classes attendance to the mothers, and 2) to discover the impact of home teaching only on the intellectual development of a sampling of four-year-olds with limited economic opportunities.

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The outcomes of the project clearly indicated that mothers would accept home teaching, indeed, they were enthusiastic about it with 91% of all home visits completed as planned. Cognitive test data collected on project children found that the program had its greatest effect on those youngsters who were judged most in need of assistance with the experimental children significantly outperforming the control children on general intellectual ability as a result of project participation.

Ypsilanti-Carnegie Infant Education Project

The Ypsilanti-Carnegie Infant Education Project (1968-70) was one of the first home-based preventive early education programs for economically disadvantaged infants. (Lambie, Bond, Weikart, 1974) Infants entered the project at three, seven or eleven months of age and were randomly assigned to one of three treatments (experimental, contrast, control), creating an age-by-treatment factorial design. A total of 65 families participated. The experimental treatment consisted of weekly home visits with mothers and infants by trained educators over a 16-month period and intensive observation and testing. The contrast treatment consisted of weekly home visits by untrained women from the community and the same testing schedule as in the experimental group. Families in the control group received only the same testing as families in the other groups.

The findings of the project indicate that the experimental group mothers provided the most supportive verbal interactions with their children, that the children of the experimental group consistently, though not always significantly, scored higher on measures of intellectual ability, and that they displayed better language development than the other groups. A surprising outcome of the study was the finding that control group children attained Binet scores (while lower than the experimental group) that were slightly higher than the population mean (110) at three years of age (31-39 months) during follow-up testing. This finding contradicts past experience with children from similarly economically disadvantaged homes in Ypsilanti. It seems possible that the intensive testing, interviewing, and observation which control group families received represented an educational treatment of sorts.

Ypsilanti Preschool Curriculum Demonstration Project

The Ypsilanti Curriculum Demonstration Project was designed to address the question of whether some preschool curricula might be

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more beneficial than others for economically disadvantaged children. Three well developed preschool curricula were contrasted (Weikart, 1969, 1971): the Cognitive Curriculum developed during the Ypsilanti-Perry Preschool Project from a largely Piagetian theory base; the Language Curriculum which was a highly structured language-focused program developed by Bereiter and Engelmann; and a Unit-Based Curriculum modeled after traditional nursery school programs organized around "units" of activity.

From 1967 through 1969, 94 economically disadvantaged children from Ypsilanti, Michigan, participated in the project, each having been randomly assigned to one of three educational treatments. Two cohorts of children (N=43) completed two full years of preschool in one of three programs with weekly home teaching visits conducted in the same curriculum style as the preschool classroom by teachers designed to involve mothers more directly in the education of their children. Another 36 children completed two years of preschool without home teaching.

Longitudinal findings through second grade on children who had both preschool and home teaching indicated that all three programs had very similar and very positive effects during the preschool period in spite of dramatic differences in program philosophies and operations. Children in all three programs evidenced large gains on standardized tests during preschool. A report currently in progress closely examines data obtained during kindergarten, first, and second grades in order to determine whether any important curriculum-related differences emerged once experimental treatment ceased and children entered school.

Implications

In many respects, the projects described are probably the most extensive and among the most carefully controlled early education projects performed in the last decade. All of the projects, except the short-term Ypsilanti Home Teaching project, are in longitudinal follow-up status permitting both statements about short-term outcomes as well as statements regarding long-term impact. All of the projects provided delivery of home teaching to participating families. While focus on the mother as the legitimate person to establish goals for her child was present in the initial work in 1962, it was not clearly articulated or fully implemented until the Home Teaching Project in 1966. Since that time, all work in the homes has followed that philosophic orientation and ethical

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committtment. In addition to home teaching, the Ypsilanti Perry Preschool Project and the Ypsilanti Curriculum Demonstration Project provided half day preschool classroom sessions as well to all participating children.

While the analysis of these project data are underway at this time, several observations pertain to the discussion of effectiveness of preschool education and home teaching. First, home teaching and preschool classroom education seem to be a powerful combination of mothods to affect the growth and development of young children from economic disadvantaged homes over the long term. Whether preschool classroom experience alone or home teaching alone would be as effective is not answered by these data. However, it seems important to suggest that any particular single solution to the problems of adequate education for young children is an over simplification. The particular method of service is more a matter of adapting a number of options to the needs of a particular group of families than the selection of one method that "works better" than any other. Issues of quality of operation, types of measures utilized to assess formative and summative results, and the gradual construction of true alternative systems of education for child development are more important than any one particular organizational scheme. True service to children and their families will only result when the professionals responsible for such service recognize their role and responsibilities.

Specifically, it is not a question of parent involvement education vs. no parent involvement. The problems of quality education stretch beyond such limits. Issues that need discussion include at least these four:

1. Staff Model. More important than the particular form of any program is the manner in which the staff operate that program to deliver the services or curriculum. A staff model includes the manner and amount of supervision staff receive, the style of administration of the program, the manner in which inservice training is provided, and, in general, the procedures employed by the program to function.

2. Outcome variables. When does a program deliver "assistance" to a group of participants? Traditionally, in educational services, certain academic skills are measured by such tests as the Metropolitan Achievement Test or the Wide Range Achievement Test, certain cognitive abilities are assessed by the Stanford-Binet Intelligence test, and so

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forth. Yet, there is deep reserve about these instruments, and, indeed, there is substantial question about the validity of programs preparing students to achieve in schools as they are currently operated. It is impossible to evaluate program effects by measures that are considered to be invalid.

3. Continuity of service. Many programs today are offered as temporary efforts to assist an individual reach a limited goal. It is known that neither preschool classroom experience or parent involvement or almost any other service "cure" or "innoculate" the child from future difficulty or insure future success. Our basic problem is to alter the traditional segmentation of services, of schooling, of parent involvement; to change the pattern of traditional schooling, and to introduce innovation in early stimulation and development. Then we need to insure innovation throughout the school, linking the various aspects of specific programs together.

4. Implication of deficit hypothesis. There is a need to face the implications for programming and research when the orientation toward the deficit hypothesis in designing services and education is eliminated. Broad band curricula serving a wide range of children simultaneously and acceptance of multiple outcomes on multiple criteria reflect this new orientation.

Any solution adopted by educators or policy makers that does not at least include the aggressive consideration of the above points must recognize the short-term nature of the solution because there is no one right way to accomplish anything and even simple solutions need massive assistance to be effective. Such assistance is even more important as the program is targeted on long-range efforts.

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